


THE FORMATION OF 'POLICY TRUTHS': FOUCAULT AND SOCIAL POLICY DISCOURSE

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PRESENTATION AIMS...

- ▶ Discuss current approaches to policy analysis
 - ▶ Illustrate an alternative method for policy analysis influenced by the theoretical concepts of Michel Foucault
 - ▶ Briefly analyse current research which has focused upon education policy and education reform in the United Kingdom (UK)
 - ▶ Introduce the concept of 'policy truths' and explain how this idea can aid in the critique of neoliberal policies and neoliberal governmentality
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CURRENT APPROACHES TO POLICY ANALYSIS...

- ▶ Policy analysis as a field of research and inquiry has grown as a direct result of the shift towards evidence-based policy under the New Labour government in the late 1990's
 - ▶ Policy sociologists need to produce work that is 'useful' and 'useable' (Shortall, 2013)
 - ▶ Lingard (2013) makes the point that currently 'evidence-informed policy' is a more accurate depiction of what happens in the policy process
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ALTERNATIVE WAY OF DOING POLICY ANALYSIS

- ▶ We need to understand 'policy intentions' *before* we debate and discuss 'policy implications'
 - ▶ Policies need to be understood within a context of different values, ideologies, beliefs and principles; which themselves are linked and connected to the wider political intentions of those in power
 - ▶ Policy translations and policy enactments (Ball et al. 2011)
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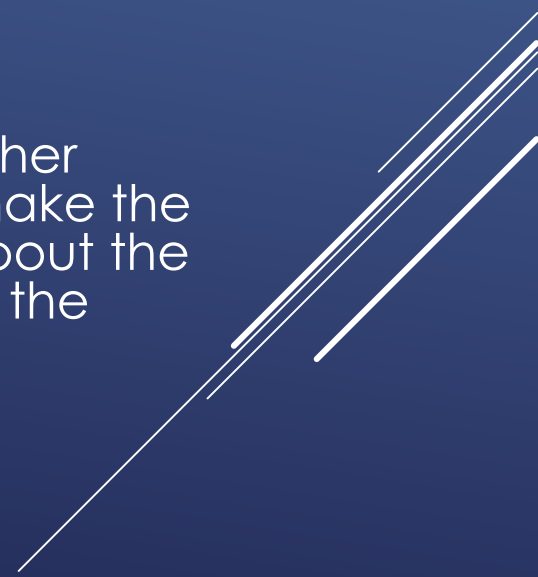
FOUCAULDIAN THEORY: WHAT IT OFFERS...

- ▶ As Shortall (2013) articulates, “an interesting and unresolved element of the debate within evidence-based policy is whether it is the power of the idea or the power of the supporter which has most effect” (p.1093)
 - ▶ Foucauldian critique highlights the relationship between power and truth. Utilising the concept of governmentality and the framework of power-knowledge illustrates how “that which is has not always been” (Oksala, 2007, p.11)
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CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND FOUCAULT...

- ▶ CDA allows for a detailed investigation of the relationship of language to other social processes, and how language works within power relations (see Taylor, 2004)
 - ▶ Foucault (1982) argued that, “the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are” (p.216)
 - ▶ For Jager and Maier (2009) CDA is a method by which we can “disentangle the giant milling mass of discourse” (p.36) and critically investigate the ongoing production of reality through discourse, conveyed by active subjects (p.37)
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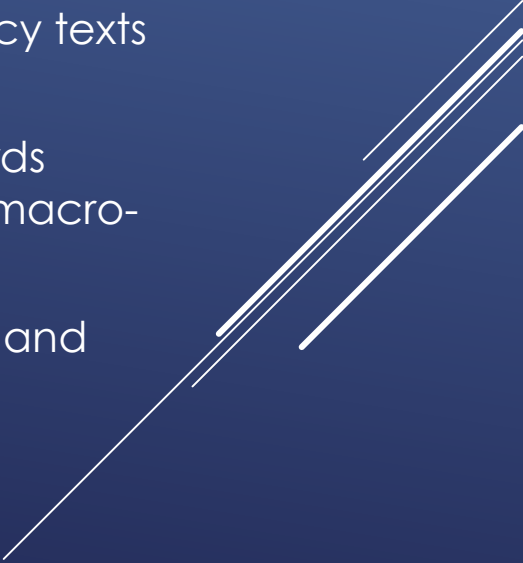
CURRENT RESEARCH...

- ▶ In terms of analysing neoliberal policies and political agenda's, neoliberalism in some cases provides the tools for resistance and refusal (Ball & Olmedo, 2013)
 - ▶ Globalised neoliberal social and economic policies (for which education is at the forefront). 'Policy mimickery' occurs in relation to both the policy intentions and the language
 - ▶ Gunter (2011) *The Academies Programme*, Hatcher (2011) *Free Schools under the Coalition* – both make the arguments that we need to understand more about the inner-workings and practices of these policies at the micro (intensive) scale
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THE FORMATION AND CONVERGENCE OF 'POLICY TRUTHS' ...

- ▶ 1) Academies are more aspirational and offer more rigorous education than other state maintained schools
 - ▶ 2) Academies tackle underperformance through their autonomous status
 - ▶ 3) Academies help close the attainment gap between the richest and the poorest children
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POLICY TRUTHS, POLICY PROCESS, POLICY ANALYSIS...

- ▶ So what do policy truths offer to the field of policy studies and analysis as a theoretical concept?
 - ▶ Place more immediate attention on understanding the intentions of policymakers and politicians
 - ▶ Encourage the policy process to be viewed as a dynamic and fluid interplay between different values, ideologies and power relations
 - ▶ Illustrate the fact that there is no single reading of policy texts and policy discourses (Taylor, 1997)
 - ▶ Argue the fact that policy analysis should move towards analysing specific micro-level phenomena within the macro-level context
 - ▶ Highlights the need to look more at policy translations and policy enactments (Ball et al. 2011)
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CONCLUSION...

- ▶ Policy analysis should be theoretical, critical and reflexive but should always be 'useful' and 'useable'
 - ▶ Intentions before implications – real-world policy solutions to real-world policy problems
 - ▶ Policy truths are an interesting developmental concept by which we can critique policy-makers intentions and assumptions
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QUESTIONS...